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ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes Section 8 of Nigeria's National Policy on Education, the section which aims to provide equal educational opportunities for all gifted and handicapped individuals. The paper discusses cultural, socioeconomic, and political factors that impinge upon implementation of Section 8 and the need for continuous policy evaluation in Nigeria. An overview of Nigeria's economic and political situation is provided. Section 8 is described as an equivalent of Public Law 94-142 in the United States, instituted in Nigeria in 1977. Section 8 attempts to provide education for all handicapped children while recognizing their roles in the development of the nation, and to develop skills of the exceptionally gifted so that they can foster economic and technological advancements. The policy appears to have been bothered by a lack of accountability at all levels, and is plagued by endemic problems of culture, socioeconomics, and politics. Continuous evaluation of the policy is recommended, in order to detect how far the policy has helped in restructuring and formulating a new society, influencing curriculum changes, and promoting democratic ideals. Includes 23 references. (JDD)

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SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICIES IN NIGERIA: CULTURAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES

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Abstract

Special education policies in Nigeria emanate from overall educational policies. These policies provide guidelines for working with exceptional individuals. One of such policies is Section 8 of the National Policy on Education which aims at providing equal educational opportunities for all gifted and handicapped individuals. Section 8 recognizes the roles of the gifted and the handicapped in social, economic and technological developments of Nigeria. This policy appears to be a pièce-de-résistance in Nigeria. However, it is not formulated as a result of advocacy, litigation and legislation. Coupled with this weakness are economic, cultural, socio-economic and political problems which plague policies of the magnitude of Section 8 in Nigeria. In this paper, the authors analyze Section 8 of the National Policy on Education, and discuss cultural, socio-economic and political factors that impinge upon its implementation in Nigeria. In addition, the authors discuss the need for continuous policy evaluation in developing countries.

SPECIAL EDUCATION POLICIES IN NIGERIA:
CULTURAL, SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL ISSUES

Special education policies are consistently ingrained into overall educational policies in Nigeria. They are not formulated in isolation because of the federal role in providing educational opportunities for its citizens. One policy that stands out is Section 8 of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria, an equivalent of Public Law 94-142 in the United States, which was instituted by the Federal Ministry of Education in 1977. Section 8 recognizes various forms of exceptionalities and spells out directional policies of special education in Nigeria. This policy appears to be a commendable effort by Nigeria to direct strategies for ameliorating problems confronting exceptional children. However, these children are not well-served in various capacities because of factors associated with culture, socio-economics and politics (Akutu, 1976; Nwigwe, 1979; Obiakor 1982, 1987, 1988; Obiakor, Ihunnah & Jones, 1989; Obiakor & Maltby, 1989). Apparently, there are few checks and balances on policies, especially those of the magnitude contained in Section 8 of the National Policy on Education.

In this paper, the authors analyze Section 8 of the National Policy on Education in Nigeria since its inception in 1977. Embodied in this analysis are cultural, socio-economic and political factors that impinge upon special education policies in Nigeria. In addition, the authors discuss the need for continuous evaluation of educational policies in developing countries.

Nigeria: A Brief Overview

Nigeria gained its independence from Britain in October 1960. According to the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (1983), 250 ethnic and language groups are scattered all over the states of

the federation, and 299 local government areas. Today, Nigeria has more than 120 million people, 21 states and more local government areas. Since independence, Nigeria has been ruled by eight different governments (six military and two constitutionally elected governments). At present, it is ruled by a military government. Diamond (1984) noted that each military coup has occurred as a result of three undergirding variables, namely: (a) staggering corruption, (b) crippling economic waste and mismanagement, and (c) disruption of the electoral process through violence and fraud. Interestingly enough, the current military government is setting the stage for the third constitutionally elected civilian government. Economic and political situations have deteriorated in the eyes of the "puritanic" military government which now has no option than to hand over power to the civilians. Of course, there is no guarantee that the civilian government will eliminate socio-economic woes of the Nigerian people. Ake (1981) acknowledged that politics has become a matter of warfare, life and death in Nigeria. As a result, there has been always a desperate struggle for state power. Since independence, the state has been the chief avenue for the accumulation of wealth and the acquisition of resources. Much of the wealth has been accumulated through government contracts, jobs, import licenses, and development projects; and little has been accumulated through any substantially independent producing business. These kinds of malaise are not accidental. Apparently, the kind of education acquired from the British colonial masters did not encourage productivity. Bude (1983) reiterated the fact that the cultures of the British colonial masters gave the Nigerian people little consideration in program planning and development. According to Obiakor and Maltby (1989):

> Colonization reduced the impact of traditional education and introduced western culture, education and christianity. Colonial education was

> focused on (a) eradication of illiteracy, ignorance and superstition by introducing the 3 Rs (reading, arithmetic and writing) at an "mushroom" level, (b) producing clerks, massengers and half-educated people who were intimidated by authority figures; and (c) tribalism, nepotism, stateism, ethnocentrism, bribery and corruption. (p. 19)

The above statement does not downplay the important role played by the British colonial regime in socio-economic and political developments of Nigeria. It does not, in any way, put the whole burden of underdevelopment of Nigeria on Britain. The fact remains that the dream of an educated Nigerian is still to push a pen behind an office desk. Other pertinent facts are apparent. With the rapidly growing population of over 120 million people, Nigeria is still searching for innovative ways to feed its people. Food importation has been so large that the government instituted what it called the "Green Revolution." There is exodus of young people to big cities allowing the rural areas to be socially and economically underdeveloped. The per capita income continues to be either static or dropping; and the economic strain continues to be felt at all segments of the society. As Leavy (1990) pointed out, "Nigeria is a unique country with some unique problems that are born out of unique circumstances" (p. 82). It is reasonable to assume that these circumstances (no matter how unique) are a result of a lack of sound philosophical base of education which, to some extent, can meet cultural, social, economic, and political needs of the people.

Special Education Policies in Nigeria

Special education policies in Nigeria emanate from overall educational policies. The level of awareness of Nigerian parents does not impact upon advocacy, litigation and legislation. "Normal" citizens are still unaware of the advantages of personal freedom. Those who are aware have not taken advantage of the intricacies of the law. With consistent transitional

governments, it is difficult and sometimes unreasonable to solidify educational policies and programs which, to many, are excessively politicized.

Special education policies in Nigeria cannot be discussed in isolation. They seem to be ingrained in educational decisions made by the federal, state and local governments. Section 8 of the National Policy on Education is a great attempt to address the needs of exceptional individuals. This policy did not just come to be. Other policies have attempted to sensitize the Nigerian populace about the educational needs of all people.

About two decades ago, Nigeria instituted educational goals which could reflect a national philosophy. According to Eke (1972), these goals would make Nigeria:

1. A strong and self-reliant nation.
2. A great and dynamic economy.
3. A just and egalitarian society.
4. A free and democratic nation.
5. A land full of opportunities for all its citizens. (p. 3)

The above goals are seemingly interwoven with the basic ingredients of philosophy which, in no way, have been pragmatically pursued. They seem to be divorced from the cardinal goals of traditional education. These goals are to inspire Nigerians to:

1. Develop the latent physical skills.
2. Inculcate respect for elders and those in a position of authority.
3. Develop intellectual skills.
4. Develop character.
5. Acquire specific vocational training and develop a healthy attitude toward honest labor.
6. Develop a sense of belonging and participate actively in family and community affairs.
7. Understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large. (Fafunwa, 1976, p. 20)

Nigeria took a giant step in September 1976 to develop the Universal Primary Education (UPE) program with the aim of eradicating illiteracy, ignorance, and superstition (Federal Ministry of Education, 1977a). The UPE

program has been documented to suffer from many setbacks, such as poor organization, poor financing, less emphasis on rural education and special education (Obiakor, 1988; Obiakor & Maltby, 1988, 1989). The 6-3-3-4 program which was later established in the 1980s to broaden the scope of the UPE program has also been found to be struggling. This program suggests six years of primary school, three years of junior high school which allows students to make career decisions, three years of high school which solidifies selected career path, and four years of university education. The Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (1986) stated that "a successful implementation of this programme should provide a sound footing for the technological transformation of the Nigerian society within the next generation" (p. 38). At present, university graduates have a very high unemployment rate; and there is unavailable data regarding the progress of integrated special students. Is it not counterproductive to gear individuals toward a career path that will never come to fruition? How prepared are Nigerian university students who are unable to get current textbooks and research techniques because of the current economic trend?

Ogbue (1975, 1981) wrote extensively on special education administration and facilities in Nigeria. Her 1975 study was supported by the Special Education Unit of the Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, Nigeria. Her findings included the following:

1. 27% of teachers involved in special education were trained specialists.
2. Five categories were catered to: the blind and partially sighted; the deaf and partially hearing; the physically handicapped; the mentally handicapped; and the hospitalized children.

3. A high percentage of the money came from individual gifts, local and international organizations, and voluntary agencies.
4. Annual subvention came from the ministries.
5. There were no facilities in the country for the purchase and technical maintenance of special education equipment and teaching aids.

In 1977, the Federal Ministry of Education moved a step further to establish Section 8 of the National Policy on Education which addresses the needs of exceptional students. Section 8, a portion that spells out in details the directional policy of special education in Nigeria, is an equivalent of Public Law 94-142 in the United States. This policy has the following fundamental goals:

1. To give concrete meaning to the idea of equalizing educational opportunities for all children, their physical, emotional disabilities notwithstanding.
2. To provide adequate education for all handicapped children and adults in order that they may fully play their roles in the development of the nation.
3. To provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted children to develop at their own pace in the interest of the nation's economic and technological development. (Federal Ministry of Education, 1977b, p. 1)

Section 8 generally requires the Federal Ministry of Education to set up a committee to conduct special education activities in collaboration with the Ministries of Health, Local Welfare and Labor. It also requires that a census be taken of all handicapped children and adults by age, sex, locality and type. As soon as feasible, all Teacher Training Colleges will be required to provide general and basic courses to all prospective teachers who will teach in normal schools but who require such knowledge to identify and help handicapped children. In addition, the Ministries of Education (i.e. federal and state governments) will be required to arrange crash courses of in-service training for all teachers of handicapped children. Section 8 proposes the

integration of special students into regular classrooms. Put another way, special classes and units will be provided in the "ordinary" schools or "normal" educational setting. Section 8 advocates free education of exceptional students at all levels and the provision of suitable employment opportunities for handicapped workers. ⟷ Most importantly, Section 8 calls for the establishment of the committee on special education, the National Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled, and the National Council on Special Education, and for collective responsibility of these bodies.

It is apparent that Section 8 provides the directional policies of special education in Nigeria. It is a well-intended policy which has not been pragmatically pursued. Recent studies by Ihunnah (1984) and Oluigbo (1986) have made salient revelations. Ihunnah (1984) used a survey research design methodology to study improvements in special education facilities, enrollment, and manpower in Nigeria. His discoveries included the following:

1. There has been an increase in the number of qualified teaching personnel in special education.
2. Students' enrollment is not commensurate with teacher preparation.
3. Established mechanisms for policy implementations are not consistently enforced.
4. There is a lack of specialized consultants and qualified educational planners in strategic areas.

Oluigbo (1986) did a much more elaborate study which used (a) on the spot investigation, (b) returns made on specially designed performance, (c) questionnaire from special education students, (d) United National Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization materials, (e) expert oral interviews and discussions, and (f) comparison and association of existing situations with

results of the exercises carried out in other parts of the world. This elaborate study was again supported by the Special Education Unit of the Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos, Nigeria.

Oluigbo's results revealed the following:

1. There are improvements in qualified personnel.
2. Students' enrollment is not still commensurate with teacher or personnel preparation.
3. Established mechanisms are still not consistently enforced.

The aforementioned studies seem to suggest that efforts have been made to establish special education policies in Nigeria. However, these studies seem to portray some flaws in policy implementation. The authors argue that there are apparent cultural, socio-economic and political issues that hamper special education advancements in Nigeria. These issues are explored in details below.

Cultural Issue - Culture is a complex web which ties together the knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, capabilities and habits acquired by a person as a societal member. Cultural heterogeneity exists in Nigeria--these divergent cultures are supposed to be considered in policy making and implementation. Three major tribes (Ibo, Hausa, and Yoruba) seem to be dominant; and any social change in Nigeria ultimately considers their social actions. Before the influence of the western culture, many Nigerians worshipped "false" gods, respected bangles and charms, and even performed some outrageous activities (e.g. killing of twins, euthanasia, etc.). The institution of the UPE program faced some unexpected religious and cultural problems. Its benefits were misconstrued and not properly communicated to people at the grassroot level. Onwuegbu (1977) confirmed that care of the

handicapped in Nigeria is relegated to the background due to ignorance, superstitions, taboos, and perceptions related to ethnic cultures.

Socio-economic Issue - Nigeria has immense human and natural resources. However, it has been susceptible to the economic and social crises suffered by the industrialized countries. It has been tremendously affected by the world's oil-glut. Many Nigerians have not fully benefitted from special education policies because of inadequate funding. The dream of making Nigeria a great and dynamic economy has tentatively failed. The economy is in shambles; and some Nigerian citizens have consistently explored negative values of bribery, fraud, embezzlement, nepotism, tribalism, and stateism for survival. It is one thing to initiate policies; however, it is another thing to implement those policies. It is apparent that Nigeria cannot advance economically without educational, cultural, social, and political advancements (Obiakor & Maltby, 1988, 1989).

Political Issue - Politics cannot be divorced from education, culture, society, religion and economics. Special education policies and other educational policies will be difficult to implement without political considerations. Urwick (1983) revealed that the military government instituted the UPE program not necessarily to meet the needs of the citizens of the country, but to boost its political credibility. If this statement is correct, it is reasonable to assume that Nigerian military governments have failed in their "puritanic" political moves. Obiakor and Maltby (1989) outlined some political problems which impede educational policies and implementation in African nations. These problems include, but are not limited to the following:

1. There is less emphasis on national interest/patriotism.

2. Foreign countries set the tone of political ideology (the West versus the East ideology) through their development aids and transfer of technology.
3. The tribe or religion is given more consideration than political manifestos.
4. Political leaders find it difficult to hand-over power without bloodshed.
5. There is a frequency of transitional governments.
6. Political accountability of rulers to the ruled is not considered.
7. There is incessant politicization of educational, cultural, societal, religious and economic policies.

Diamond (1984) addressed similar concerns about Nigerian politics. He emphasized that (a) Nigeria must deal effectively with the problem of corruption or the social structural failure, (b) Nigeria is not yet at the point in its development when politicians can be expected or trusted to regulate themselves, and (c) something is fundamentally wrong with Nigerian politics. Thousands have died in political combat (e.g. Nigerian/Biafran war) and billions lost to political corruption. In another publication few years later, Diamond (1989) maintained a similar direction when he wrote:

> If the pervasive corruption of Nigerian politics and society is to change, incentives must be established for creative enterprise in the economy and honest service to the public. And just as importantly--maybe more so--incentives must be established against corrupt behavior. It must become risky. It must become costly. Those who engage in it must start getting caught, with some regularity. Those who get caught must be made to pay a heavy price. (p. 29)

Need for Continuous Policy Evaluation

It appears that developing countries spend much of their time debating on causes of their perennial socio-economic and political setbacks. It is unfortunate that leaders of these countries attempt to (a) dissociate the fate

of democracy from the quality of intellectual leadership by pigeon-holing talented specialists,' (b) blame colonial dominance and world powers for endemic socio-economic problems, and (c) act as tribal/regional leaders rather than national leaders.

In Nigeria, policy establishment negatively correlates with policy implementation. Section 8 of the National Education Policy seems to be a well-intended policy. However, it has not been a well-implemented policy. Nigeria, like many developing nations, needs to continuously evaluate its special education policies and programs. Continuous evaluations will enable policy/program planners and evaluators to:

1. Detect how well the policy helps in restructuring and formulating a new society.
2. Discover how well the policy affects the culture, society, economy and politics of the people.
3. Detect if the policy promotes democratic ideals which emphasize (a) the importance of the individual, (b) social responsibility, and (c) freedom, and liberty.
4. Find out how successful the policy is, i.e. availability of funds and personnel.
5. Promote accountability of all echelons of government.
6. Discover if the policy reflects the education, training and complex organizations required by any modern technology.
7. Put the blame where it belongs, i.e. in the hands of policy/program administrations.
8. Influence curriculum changes and planning to highlight (a) objectives, (b) subject-matter, (b) methods and organization, and (d) evaluation.

9. Diffuse innovation with appropriate methodologies; and to discover at the onset the innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards.

Conclusion

Special education policies in Nigeria, it seems, emanate from overall educational policies. One tangible policy which has attracted the attention of educators and researchers is the establishment of Section 8 of the National Policy on Education. Section 8 has been aimed at (a) giving concrete meaning to equality of educational opportunities for all children respective of their physical, mental, and emotional disabilities, (b) providing education for all handicapped children while recognizing their roles in the development of the nation, and (c) developing skills of the exceptionally gifted so that they could foster economic and technological advancements. Section 8 appears to be a pièce-de-résistance in Nigeria, a country that gained its independence about 30 years ago. However, recent studies have indicated that this policy has been bothered by a lack of accountability at all levels. In addition, there are indications that the policy is plagued by endemic problems of culture, socio-economics and politics. The authors have argued, to a large extent, that policies, such as Section 8, need to be continuously evaluated in developing countries. Continuous evaluation, no doubt, will (a) detect how far the policy has helped in restructuring and formulating a new society, (b) put the blame where it belongs, (c) influence curriculum changes and planning, and (d) promote democratic ideals.

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